

Unit 1 My Life

Letters from Recent Graduates

Welcome to a new season of High School Magazine.

To start off the new school year on the right foot, we asked some of our recent graduates to give us tips on how to succeed in the coming year and beyond.

Compare Apples to Apples

In high school, everyone told me how talented an artist I was, so I dreamed of becoming an illustrator.

In university, though, everyone seemed much more talented than me, and they all worked so hard that I felt small in comparison. I thought about giving up my dream of becoming an artist. Then one day, I happened to see a drawing I had won an award for from middle school on the kitchen wall. I was embarrassed because it wasn't very good.

People say you shouldn't compare apples to oranges, and they're right. That's why it doesn't make sense to compare yourself to Internet personalities or even people in your real life. Maybe they had an advantage, or even a disadvantage, that you didn't. If you are going to compare yourself to anyone, the only fair comparison is "yesterday-you." Only you know where you started and how much effort you've put in. I couldn't see the progress in my ability when I only compared myself to others. Everyone develops differently. I'm able to see now the drawing in the kitchen was full of mistakes that I no longer make. It is empowering to see how I have improved rather than to envy the success of others. Your competition isn't the person next door or the influencer on social media: it's you.

Don't Be Afraid to Speak Up

Do you share your opinion in class discussions, or do you just stay silent and keep it to yourself? Like many of you, I often found myself in the second group. A little black hole inside of me swallowed my voice when I considered speaking up. The consequences of being ridiculed or being wrong were always on my mind.

Then, after a particularly heated conversation in class, I asked myself, "What am I afraid of?" I was scared that bad things would happen, but I never thought about good things. When I noticed others taking risks, I knew that I needed to do the same in order to participate. Many people are scared to speak up, but a lot of them do it anyway because they think it's worth it. So I left my comfort zone and started to speak up. I grew intellectually and socially by expressing myself more clearly. I got closer to friends who liked how open I was with them. Now I have more people with whom I can talk, share my ideas, and learn new things. Remember, taking the risk of expressing yourself can be extremely rewarding in unexpected ways.

Use Energy on What You Can Control

As I worked through my second year into my third in college, I had more troubles balancing school and personal life. I would get excited, anxious, worried, and bored all at once and then separately. I would get exhausted when I had to write a report for my courses, mediate a disaster between friends, and respond to the comments on my online journal. I was drowning in a sea of responsibilities, concerns, and anxieties, and that was when I read an article with a simple insight.

The article advised me to draw two big circles, with myself in the center. The smaller circle is my circle of influence, and I have direct control over the things inside it: what I eat and drink, how I behave, or what I do after school. The bigger circle is called my circle of concern: things I worry about but have no direct control over. For example, I have no direct control over how my professor will react to my report, but I do have control over the amount of research I do for it. Believing that everything was in my circle of influence left me stressed out and constantly exhausted.

By wasting less energy on my circle of concern, I was able to invest more energy into things that mattered. I no longer worry about what my friends think, and I focus on my own actions. I don't get anxious over what might be on the test, and instead I put in every effort to understand the concepts themselves. Now, I only put my mental and physical energy into my circle of influence: eating healthy, staying in shape, and working hard.